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UA68/8/2 James Poteet Oral History

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WKU Oral History Committee

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JAMES POTEET

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PLACE: Dr. Poteet's Residence

INTERVIEWED BY: Dr. Carlton Jackson,
Department of History

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(signed) Carlton Jackson

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(date) 15 Oct, 76

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(interviewer)

(date)

Carlton Jackson: Well, I want to know about your teaching here at Western. When did you come to Western?

Dr. James Poteet: September the twelfth, 1931. Hottest day - dirty -

C.J.: Uh-huh, why Western and not some place else?

J.P.: Well, I don't know. I was down at Ruston, Louisiana and I was just filling in down there. The man had gone but they'd promised if he wanted to come back, why, he could, and so they would offer me something in something else but my advisor at John Hopkins - Dr. Rodney - you probably know of him - and so he'd been here lecturing in June or July, June, I guess it was, on lectures they had back in those days. They'd just put in graduate work here. So then I was recommended to here so I contacted and they a - I didn't have anything else in mind at that time and so I being out of graduate school not too long, I needed some money (Right!) so I landed here on the twelfth of September. Oh, it was hot then. That train was the dirtiest train - you know there was no air conditioning in those days so I went to the Helm Hotel. Not too much to brag about.

C.J.: When you first visited the Western campus was there any one thing about it that you - that stands out in your mind that you remember?

J.P.: No, not particularly except that it wasn't very impressive. We were in an old Potter College (uh-huh) Cherry Hall wasn't here and the a - it was as I say not impressive. And this little Post Office was right near the entrance in that building and right on the other side was

the little bookstore.

C.J.: In Potter Hall?

J.P.: In Potter, I think they call that dormitory Potter Hall. But anyway that Post Office was about the size of this little room and so was the bookstore.

C.J.: How many students were there?

J.P.: I think there were around - it was an unusual time because of the changing of certification. They had been getting it, you know, so that they could teach if they had 15 hours and they were changing the certification to the point where they would have to have at least a couple of years work, like a couple years of college work in order to be certified and so they just poured in. I guess in the fall there must of been around - oh, I'd say fifteen hundred. And then in the spring semester, that short spring semester, there were three thousand. There - that was that many, you know, coming in trying to get certified on this 15 hour basis.

C.J.: How many faculty members were there, approximately?

J.P.: Well, we had - it was a very small number, but in the History Department, one, two, three, four, five in the History Department. Three men, I mean two men and three women and in proportion to that there probably - faculty would have been limited, I would think, to maybe sixty or seventy; not over that because it was very limited and we had our offices - Stickles and I had an office together with three women - you remember them - Miss Anderson, Miss Robertson, and Miss Egburt, and they

had theirs over at a place and that was the main part of Western and little old Ogden down there — there was nothing down there you know, except the Ogden Building and then that other building.

C.J.: One thing that I wonder about, what was the relationship between faculty and students of those day. Friendly? Unfriendly? Strained? Formal? Informal? Or just what?

J.P.: I'd say very friendly and informal.

C.J.: Friendly and informal?

J.P.: You knew the faculty. You knew the students, and they were somewhat older than the students of today. The freshmen class probably was a little bit - maybe considered a year older on the average than the present day freshmen.

C.J.: I wonder why.

J.P.: Well, there was just - there wasn't a great deal of emphasis still you see and the well, the parents - it was of course right after the Depression, you might say it was in the Depression and it was very difficult to find the means to get to school and they were out working trying to build up some and they would go out and teach from August to February then they'd be into the spring semester. That's my own explanation for it, but I mean there was more students considering the faculty worthwhile then and more respect than you will find today not only Western but anywhere you go.

C.J.: There wasn't, was there a great deal of what today we call student power?

J.P.: Well, the students didn't exercise any power at all, I mean, they were more - they took it as though it was expected to be that way. (I see) No, we didn't have any student organization. That didn't come into being really until after the war.

C.J.: Tell me something about the convocations that you used to go to at Western. I remember when I came here had to go to them one convocation a week. But I think there was a time that the faculty went to two convocations a week, or maybe three? And sometimes, as I have been told, you have to stand up and make an impromptu speech. Can you remember any incidents?

J.P.: Well, at chapel - chapel was every day -

C.J.: Oh, every day. I see.

J.P.: Yes, when I came here now and on through Mr. Cherry's - 1937 - and then it dropped out I think under Mr. Garrett to three times a week and then by the time you came here I guess it was not compulsory at all, was it for the faculty?

C.J.: Once a week.

J.P.: Once a week?

C.J.: Yes sir.

J.P.: Then as to the convocations, I mean as to faculty meetings we, of course, had one in the beginning and then we never had faculty meetings over once a month and of course at the chapel everybody would sit on the stage and Mr. Cherry had a way of calling on different faculty members, going around to make a little speech at Chapel and that -

C.J.: Did you ever make a speech?

J.P.: I made two.

C.J.: Can you remember what they were about?

J.P.: One of them was on - I called it the "Virginia Triangle".

C.J.: What did you say?

J.P.: Jamestown, Yorktown, Williamsburg, and that was the term that had been used about, you know, the tri-cities, trade centers. See, Jamestown was the first colonial center and then it moved to Williamsburg and Yorktown was over on the York River and that is where the - if you go there today you'll see boats could - could come back up in from the York River up to Williamsburg and when I made that speech they just had opened that connecting memorial colonial parkway from Jamestown. It goes under Williamsburg and on to Yorktown. It's no commercial traffic on it at all and on that basis I took a look at Jamestown and on to the fight at Williamsburg and then on to the Battle of Yorktown or in that area I don't know what I said, but I remember that distinctly. The other one I really don't know, I don't recall.

C.J.: Do you remember anyone ever being called upon to speak and just not being able to?

J.P.: No, I don't recall.

C.J.: They all had?

J.P.: Some didn't make a speech.

C.J.: I see.

J.P.: I know once or twice they asked me to make a speech and I said I didn't have anything to talk about.

C.J.: What - President Cherry would ask you to make a speech?

J.P.: Oh, yes, as long as he was living five years there, you see. Six years. Oh, yes, and then another thing at chapel, it was called chapel while it was kind of like a convocation - the scripture reading was done. President Cherry would call on anyone who would like to quote from the Bible, a Biblical verse. One would stand up here and give a verse and over there a verse and one a verse and then he would call on different members of the faculty. That's one thing I didn't do - to read in prayer. Of course, there some who were who enjoyed it very, very much.

C.J.: Were there any student radicals back in those days? Maybe just one?

J.P.: Not of any note. No, they wre more subservient, I mean they

probably may have been but they weren't given any hearing often enough. No, I can't recall any radicalism at all. No, I don't think that appeared until primarily after the war, then they began to develop.

C.J.: Tell me something about the personalities of some people at Western. We'll start with Henry Hardin Cherry. What was he like?

J.P.: Well, you've seen the statue up there - (right) - well, that represents his physical appearance. He would stand generally, if you notice, I think isn't it something like this -

C.J.: Yeah, an arm hooked into a pocket. Yeah, right. Uh-huh.

J.P.: That was his gesture; and stern and when he tried to be humorous, he didn't know how to do it basically and when he had told something and smiled, he held his hand over his mouth and somebody said that was because he was afraid he would lose his false teeth! But that was the way of him. He seemed to become conscious, self-conscious, when ah - very pleasant but on the other hand very authoritarian.

C.J.: He could be quite the disciplinarian then?

J.P.: He could be quite disciplinary. As for the salaries. He said that it was no one's business to know anything about salaries except his own, and he didn't want faculty members discussing their salaries and there was no professional rank. (I see.) You were just an instructor.

C.J.: Well, this was still true when I came. I believe uh, '63 was the first year Western instituted any rank.

J.P.: Well, I guess you're right. It was just doled out on the basis now of one or two. And Dr. Stickles and Lee Francis Jones and for some reason Dr. Bert Smith - Bert Smith - he became a doctor later, but for some reason they were classified as professors. And I was given my title of professor in oh, I guess, it was around about 1952. I know I had been contacted by a school that - and I expressed a little interest in considering it, and Dr. Garrett came down to where I lived and sat on the porch and said, "Tell me about it." And I did and so the - the next morning he called me in and he said, "you - a - we don't want you to go," and said that you are now a full professor.

C.J.: What school was that?

J.P.: I'm not going to mention any school.

C.J.: Okay. Right. Is it true the stories I've heard about how Mr. Cherry built Van Meter Auditorium? That he contracted the state's money for it without getting approval from the state legislature and more or less forced the legislature to pay for it?

J.P.: Well, I know this. I've heard that he built it because each year he got just one lump sum. I don't know how much it would be, probably a couple of hundred thousand. Of course, the budget was very small. And then he doled it out and in part is why he did not wish the faculty to discuss their salary because the money he doled was given to the school basically for the faculty. I think he, I'd heard that he - that was the way the Home Economics - the old Home Economics building was built and probably the training school and the a - now as to Van Meter it was one of the first buildings that was built, because his ideal was chapel and

assembly and participation by the students and then during the oil boom that was when Potter Hall was built.

C.J.: During the what boom?

J.P.: Oil boom of the 1920's. That's when - you have heard of Cherry Village, haven't you?

C.J.: Uh-huh.

J.P.: Well, now that's when it was put up because there was nowhere to - because if you've got a room, rent was anywhere from 100 to 150 dollars and there was no place available. So he built with the students, they built Cherry Town or whatever they called it and it was at that time then that the first dormitory was built which was old Potter Hall and that was supposed to have been built out of money from oil. Western didn't become a four year college until 1924 and so it is true that he diverted the money as he wished. And the in 1936 or 7, we began getting our checks from Frankfort - the teachers did. And consequently that was the time that he died...

C.J.: Okay, what about Mr. Garrett -

J.P.: Well, I'd say Mr. Garrett was a very fine person in many ways but he was not a good administrator. He once said that PhD's were a dime a dozen and he didn't have much interest in developing the faculties salaries. Very definitely, they were down and numerous... a number of faculty members left because they just couldn't stay on.

C.J.: Was there ever any vocal dissent among the faculty?

J.P.: I would say there was some, I mean, but nothing of a very concerted form very much.

C.J.: It never went any place?

J.P.: No, He was a bit of a Caesar.

C.J.: I don't want to ask any really personal questions but, what about the salary ranges back in those days, some idea of what a person would make back in the thirties and forties.

J.P.: Well, as far as I know, never did say I know too much, I think the top salary was Dr. Stickles forty-two hundred.

C.J.: And that would be what year? What year was that?

J.P.: Well, I'd say it was about forty-two hundred when I came here because I heard Dr. Stickles say that Mr. Harmon wanted him to come down to the Business Univesity about that time and Mr. Cherry asked him not to consider it, and it was that time that he gave him forty-two hundred. Now, the ... in the basic rank in there; normally, when I came to Western at three thousand. Dr. Stephens had come about - he didn't have his doctorate at that time, but normally the range would, say, would be from twenty-four hundred up to thirty-five hundred. Twenty-four hundred up to thirty-six hundred with a few exception, as I mentioned Dr. Stickles.

C.J.: What a -

J.P.: And that was following the Depression.

C.J.: Following the Depression.

J.P.: See the Depresssion ended by thirteen, in 1933, didn't it? 'Cause the banks were all closed the first year I was here, '32. But it a - Mr. Cherry just thought in terms, and his salary in proportion was down. I don't know what it was but, he never boosted his salary very much above his faculty and he - a - of course he lived in the president's home but he - a - but he just thought that you should make a teacher was - a - should make a contribution to society by a service rather than seeking money.

C.J.: Was there any emphasis on research back in those days?

J.P.: A - yes, there was some. In particular - Dr. Stickles was interested in and he did his study of Buckner. But - and but, in so far as in general basis it was like making serious speeches, I think. The history department called upon and my study was to study a - who became the first territorial governor of Illinois?

C.J.: Harrison?

J.P.: No, not Harrison.

C.J.: Not Harrison?

J.P.: Oh, he was from Kentucky. It was at the time, you know, that Abraham Lincoln went in there and met - oh, I can't think of his name

but anyway I did that. It was and a ...

C.J.: And you gave lectures to the faculty?

J.P.: No, it was published.

C.J.: Published, I see.

J.P.: I believe in the Courier. It was that type, I wouldn't call it that particularly any profound research. We didn't have it such as you're doing or such as others are doing now. We didn't have time because you have a heavy load always - five maybe six classes. Student enrollment - my heaviest enrollment one semester was 250.

C.J.: 250.

J.P.: And that was through there and Dr. Cherry -

C.J.: And I'll bet you gave all essay tests, didn't you?

J.P.: Oh, yes. We didn't have word test. You know, or anything like that.

C.J.: Were you ever challenged by a student on a grade?

J.P.: I never was, no.

C.J.: Now-a-days, you know, if you don't give A's and B's you're almost sure to be challenged, and a lot of professors are sued for not giving

what the student thinks is the proper grade and so forth. And I just wonder if you ever had any difficulties of that sort at Western.

J.P.: They probably complained but not to me.

C.J.: But not to you! Among themselves, huh?

J.P.: And not to the history people very much. Not that we were any different from the present time, it just was, I mean there was more communications, I've said before - there between the teacher and the student.

C.J.: I see. Well, I wanted to ask you about that, do you think, do you think the faculty - the faculties of today are less learned than the faculty of the thirties? Do you think that well, do you think that Western in the 1930's was more truly an educational institution than it is today?

J.P.: Well, not really except to the fact that the classroom was more significant then athletics, otherwise no. Of course, the faculty in those days did have very limited number of doctorates. In the history department, Dr. Stickles and I were the only ones. Later, Dr. Dedmon came in, and so I would say that selection of students was just a little bit more particular in the advanced classes than it was in the later days when I was on the hill because it, I don't know whether you remember, but students didn't confer with the faculty unless they were called on to. Except in the graduate courses which the a - Mr. Chandler terminated graduate work at Western in 1937 when he became governor. So we just had graduate work there for that time and then it wasn't re-introduced

until well after World War II.

C.J.: What was you thought on that? Did you agree with the governor?

J.P.: No.

C.J.: Why?

J.P.: It concentrated, well, just the fact that we felt we I guess, now only English and history and I believe economics, very few departments offered graduate work.

C.J.: There is some talk of reverting to this kind of thing again today. Concentrating graduate studies at U.K. and U. of L. now that it is in the state system and cutting out the major portion of graduate study at regional universities. Do you agree with that? Do you think that it should be done?

J.P.: I think possibly maybe it could be done above Masters work but certainly not any lower than that. I think we were doing a good job - we turned out in history about in the period, I think, about 18 and they did excellent work because they had close supervision and you know, Columbia is beginning to cut down because they said that a few years ago they had so many people wanting to do graduate work and they had no - the faculty wasn't large enough to take care of -

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(J.P.cont.) it would have been difficult to concentrate it all in one

place because, I think... The school I'm familiar with - John Hopkins - they started out as a graduate school but, they soon learned they had to have an undergraduate and the undergraduate is now a very significant forerunner of the different graduate schools involved.

C.J.: Was there ever a debating society at Western among the faculty?

J.P.: Not that I know about.

C.J.: I guess there has always been one among the students?

J.P.: Yes, there were some, I believe there were two. I don't recall what they were named - debating societies. They always had offered students into the school of debating.

C.J.: Tell me what Ed Diddle was like in those days?

J.P.: Well, there was just one Ed Diddle. A very fine person but a - he a - most unique. He finished his degree after he came here. Well, he finished it long after I came here. He played football at Centre but completed his undergraduate work at Western long after he had been here as a coach and - a - probably and the red towel didn't come into being until I don't know when, but it wasn't in vogue when I came here but that developed at a later time. I don't know just when, but he began to wave the red towel. I was very fond of Ed. But he could make more cracks. The first time I ever really was with him we were going to KEA at Louisville and five of us were in the car and Ed entertained us by telling things in a way, for instance, he was telling about somebody who committed suicide on himself and he's known for those Diddle cracks.

C.J.: "Diddleisms."

J.P.: "Diddleisms?"

C.J.: Uh-huh. Can you remember any more?

J.P.: Well, not a - he said that to his basketball players one time, "You'd bounce that ball backwards." And he was giving many of them - he'd go in and they held hands; presumably a little prayer before moving onto the field and he said, "Now get the hell in there and play the game." But sincere, but a - I remember one time in history, he had this well-known bird dog Rex - and Rex several times came into my class when I was giving a quiz he'd go back in the back of the room and go to sleep... And then when students began coming up handing me a paper, Rex came up and looked up at me just as if to say, "I have none." And walk out with it. Never leave during the class period. Come in and go back and go to sleep. Ed was very fond of old Rex. He took him hunting and when he got home he forgot to let him out of the car and he missed him for I think a day and a half. Didn't know here he was. And finally somebody said, "I think I hear something." And he opened up the trunk of the car and he got out, and Ed said to him, "Rex, where in the hell have you been?" So he was that type of an individual. He always said that the boys played by ear. He was one of those people you can't tell, I mean, you just have to know him. Nobody can tell you much about any of us.

C.J.: Do you remember Kelly Thompson in his student days at Western?

J.P.: Well, when I came to Western in 1931, Kelly was here but he was somewhat of a representative for the school, scouted around for students

and I don't know how long but he was here a number of years before he completed his educational degree and I never knew much about him. I never knew him as a student at all.

C.J.: What about the relations between the university and the city of Bowling Green back in those days?

J.P.: It was very close because Dr. Cherry didn't have dormitories for boys. He had Potter College, I mean Potter Hall and West Hall for girls and therefore he depended on the city, on the city people to provide housing for the students, and that prevailed under Mr. Garrett for some time, time too. The city people, it was one of their main sources of income, but Mr. Cherry felt that since the people of Bowling Green had done so much for Western that he should do something for them by giving them - a - and I'd say it was right after the Depression - giving them some income from taking care of the students. I would say the relationship at that time was quite good. Quite friendly and probably as much on that economic basis as on anything else.

C.J.: Sounds as though it might be better, might have been better than it is at the moment.

J.P.: From what I hear, yes. Because it was not until Western began building dormitories that the - a - that there was any friction much between the students and the town people.

C.J.: Give me a sort of physical description of Bowling Green back in those days.

J.P.: Well, the population was between ten and eleven thousand and the limits of the city geographically were very limited. When I came here, they were in the Kettle League baseball and Class D, they called it and they had an old fairgrounds where the teams played and I don't recall any particular name of the people playing in the league. Pretty good percentage of them went on into big league baseball and of course, the churches were right there on State Street and all - and the better part of the city was moving away from the original which, of Bowling Green which was from the present square to the river, you know. They had begun to move out in various directions, but the - a - out off the Cemetery Road they were wheat fields and things out there all that area's developed out there, and they had a country club, and there was no industry here at that time. Later on came the industry. They had that ax handle factory, which I believe is still here.

C.J.: Ax handle?

J.P.: Tempa (Uh-huh) and they made baseball bats for the Louisville... It was called Tempa and they made primarily ax handles. Of course, then they began to move into other things as ax handles were no longer in great demand as they were back before the machine age. Then of course, there were tobacco factories here. It was just about as good a tobacco market then as it is today. It was, it was a railroad center. It was the cross point from Memphis. Trains from Memphis to Louisville and L & N north and south. It was all L & N of course. And was demonstrated by the fact that you can see the very nice passenger terminal is still here but not it is no trains. It was, I would say, it was a very pleasant small country town.

C.J.: Who were some of the famous speakers that came to Western, if you can remember?

J.P.: Well, now right off hand - Norman Cousins was a speaker. And Mr. - the future president of the Philippines - what was his name?

C.J.: Marcos? Romulo?

J.P.: Romulo. He came here. The a - McAdoo was a very prominent speaker. They would have centers down in the gymnasium and - I don't know.

C.J.: Mrs. Egburt told me about some speaker one time. And I can't remember who but he in his speech made the remark that George Washington was the first patron of taxi cabs in the United States. And the punch line was: He took a hack at the cherry tree.

J.P.: I don't remember that.

C.J.: And she used to tell me that very frequently, you know, because she thought it was so corny.

J.P.: The famous Louisville scientist out of University of Chicago, his wife was Helen Taft. He ran for the Senate, he was in the Senate, oh, what was his name? And then I think a very capable one, the editor of the Courier Journal, again his name escapes me, but he was a good one. There were many more, I don't know just right now. I guess I'm getting too old.

C.J.: Is there any one thing in your years at Western that stands out, you might call the highlight of your academic career? One event or one or anything of that sort?

J.P.: Well, I don't think it's - I think the best part of my stay here was the association with the faculty but in particular the history department and the personnel and I would label it 100% any time then and on down through and I guess it'll all be tied in that way. Maybe it could be the point that, when I reached the point where I made - had the responsibility for passing final judgement on members of the staff. I think it's all tied in with just being a part of what I always considered a first class department.

C.J.: A lot of comradery back then.

J.P.: Oh, yes. What I think it was that you knew the faculty, and I presume now that people of one department or one college don't know the others.

C.J.: That's quite true, quite true. Yes, I met a person just the other day who's been here for four years and I've never even heard of him. So this does go on continually.

J.P.: Well, it's a - I don't say that was better. It was better for me. I - I somehow I have a feeling that a faculty and a student body shouldn't be too hard to at least to know of each other if not personally. That was one of the reasons I chose John Hopkins because I did my masters at Columbia University and in the field of history there were about 400 in the graduate set-up. When I went down to Hopkins, we had three professors and we had 17 graduate students, some just beginning their graduate work. At the end of the two years, they were given a master's degree which was called a little Ph.D., and then at the third or fourth year, depending on how you moved along, and the faculty members would come in and sit on the

desk and chat with you. Come in the coffee room and have coffee with you and so on and that was about something the way it was when at Western, certainly up to World War II. After that, we began to lose contact - personal contact - in among the faculty.

C.J.: What did you write your dissertation on?

J.P.: I wrote my dissertation on the Virginia Constitution of 1851-52.

C.J.: I see.

J.P.: About the third, the third constitutional convention in Virginia.

C.J.: And what town in Virginia were you born in?

J.P.: I was born in the country.

C.J.: In the country.

J.P.: I was born in Franklin County the Post Office was Wirtz - W-I-R-T-Z. And I went to Fort Union in 1910. Fort Union Military Camp. 1913 - in the fall - I went to the University of Richmond. And then in 1917 I went to my first job. Was teaching in Portsworth, Virginia.

C.J.: What - what in high school?

J.P.: No, principal of an elementary school.

C.J.: Uh-huh, you were a principal?

J.P.: Yes.

C.J.: Oh, you never told me that before. I didn't know that. You were a principal.

J.P.: Two years. I was there two years in this school. I think there were twelve teachers and when anyone was absent, I took charge of that day in the sixth or seventh grade, which ever it happened to be. Always had a trained substitute in the primary grades. Depending on if one was sent by or if I didn't have time to do that, I sometimes took charge of the first grade.

C.J.: Any discipline problems?

J.P.: Well, I never had but one disciplinary one. It was a bully and I solved that one day. It wasn't a good idea but he was always tripping, particularly little girls, as they'd march out and march in, you know. So one day he tripped a little girl and I happened to be standing there and I stuck my foot out and he tripped over that, and the next day - and from then on he was the nicest kid in school.

C.J.: He was cured?

J.P.: He was cured. I think he had his way, nobody ever challenged him but as I said - going up the steps he might have fallen and mashed his face or something like that and then there might have been trouble.

C.J.: And the from Portsworth, you went where?

J.P.: Then went to Lee Junior High School in Roanoke, Virginia and then three years at Jefferson High School in Roanoke, Virginia. And then I returned to - and then I went to Hopkins full time to - one semester one year I was out because I went to Columbia.

C.J.: And then as soon as you were out of Hopkins you went to Ruston.

J.P.: Well, I taught substitute at Washington and Lee one year then I went to Louisiana Tech at Ruston, Louisiana and from there I came to Western in 1931.

C.J.: You remember the flu epidemic, don't you, of 1918?

J.P.: I surely do.

C.J.: Tell me something about it.

J.P.: Well, it's quite vague. I was principal of this school, and after school hours we a - during the flu - we would go to the - and kind of act as helpers in the Naval Base Hospital and we had to close school for three weeks and during that time we'd go over and - the lady I lived with - and get in her car and go in and see the recuperating and take them out but the Naval personnel died well, not like flies but died, the death rate was very heavy and I sometimes - I'd go over to the railroad station 'cause all the people the personnel from all over the country and when they died they died very rapidly they'd ship 'em out and the only mode of transportation was by train. I remember once or twice the train would take them to Chicago - into the central part, and from there they were distributed out over, out over the country and that railroad station in the waiting room

they had these boxes stacked up waiting for the trains to take them out. And it was, well, it was very disturbing. It hit Portsmouth and Norfolk about as heavy as anywhere because of the concentration of the Navy personnel, 'cause you see, it was in the midst of World War I. It was really - I guess as hard hit an area as any other area, probably a little more of it, too. Some of the big - I think Philadelphia and New York maybe but Norfolk and Portsmouth were the center of Naval operations in those days and you could do the ship building and all in the Hampton Roads and in the Norfolk Harbor.

C.J.: I'm just asking questions at random now. What historian has had the greatest influence on your own career?

J.P.: Well, my interest first was my history professor at Richmond College, his name was Dice Anderson. You probably never heard of him. He was - he later became president of Randolph Macon Women's College, but he - I don't know, he a - two of my classmates just somehow instilled in history. I don't know - just hadn't gotten any idea of history anywhere before. And then so I guess in the upper level it was Dr. John Holiday Latnay at Hopkins, and Dr. John Spencer Bassett and then at Columbia, Dr. Dixon Ryan Fox whose father-in-law was Herbert Osgood, and I drew him for my supervisor and he was, well, he just made you feel like somebody had an interest in you and so. But, in English history, Dr. Robert L. Schuyler, who is an author as well as a great lecturer. And of course there were others, but a Dr. Laprairdin English history from Duke. Well, a European history - Dr. Turner - E. R. Turner at John Hopkins who died very young but one of the - was already one of the brilliant English history scholars.

C.J.: Well, okay, I think I've gotten -

J.P.: Well, you got a bunch of junk.

C.J.: No, I haven't. This is very -

J.P.: All those things happened quite a long time ago and as I've told you being nearly 80, I'll think of some things tomorrow -

C.J.: Well, that's always the case. You've given some very interesting information here.

J.P.: As all I've been saying as a student, one of the people in the field of history that made me realize that its importance is Dr. A. M. Stickles.

C.J.: How did he make you realize that?

J.P.: Well, just by his own interest and actions. When I came here, he said here's what I'd like for you to do, it's yours. And he made me feel like that I didn't have to go to him or I didn't have to do anything because I should do - probably imitate him.

C.J.: Do you have any opinions about oh, maybe the last two generations, not generations, I guess, but two or three graduating classes of students most of whom have had no history whatever. This generation seems intent upon forgeting its history. Do you have any opinions about a generation that does that?

J.P.: Well, I probably have some, Carlton, but they're a little bit fuzzy right now. I was reading the other day in the Nashville - Tennessean...

TAPE TWO

(J.P. cont.) He said he had a mission and he was going to try to ride over the country because that so far in the bicenntenial period - past couple of years - that he had become somewhat disturbed because as he moved around the young people, and by young I think he said anything below 50, were wholly... and these words were his words... that the people were wholly ignorant of the need for the understanding of the country. The life of which they were the present part, and I'll have to agree with that. There's a great deal of interest in all - I think all - most, I would say, Americans are good loyal people but if you begin to ask them about American history as it tied into world history that we had just simply inherited a civilization and are going on. They just don't have it. And I remember a professor on the hill and I won't call his name, he said by that - well, he said by 1975 - and this was a long time ago - that history would be purely optional and probably studied very little in schools.

C.J.: That was a good prediction because it is almost that at Western.

J.P.: I could see that when I was on the hill when I first came here I think I've implicated that before that people had a desire - there was an awakening in the thirties - a desire to know history, but when I left teaching I think it had almost dwindled to less than 50% of what it was.

C.J.: What killed our desire to know our history?

J.P.: That's a puzzle to me.

C.J.: Was it the bomb? The young people, you know, made a lot about: the bomb exists, so why bother with anything of the past.

J.P.: I don't know. I think World War II is where the generation which is called the war generation came into being. Now, four or five years following World War II, the return of the troops, there was an eagerness, particularly those who had been overseas. They were the - that was the period of the, I guess, the most interesting, best period of my teaching were those five or six years because the returnees - military returning from overseas - they wanted to know about the world. They wanted to and they were good history students. But their offspring - that's what I can't understand. They were deeply involved, but it hasn't caught on in their children.

C.J.: So they did not pass on this eagerness to their children.

J.P.: A bit of cynicism set in there about 1955 and I think it's grown too fast.

C.J.: Where do you think it will lead us?

J.P.: Well, I don't know what is going to stop it; what's going to make it turn, but it's going to have to be some really disturbing period. I don't know how it's going to come about, but I guess we're going to have to be knocked down. We- I think we - we've never been defeated but, I

think maybe what we ought to begin to realize the effect of Vietnam. That might be the catalyst.

C.J.: Could very well be.

J.P.: Because they're not forgeting that we can taste defeat. Because Mr. Nixon said we withdrew with honor. I have to disagree with him. We withdrew, but we withdrew dragging our tails.

C.J.: Yes, I agree. I think we did.

J.P.: I don't know, Carlton, I'm no gloomy.

C.J.: You're not gloomy?

J.P.: No, I -

C.J.: So many people are, though.

J.P.: I know it. That's what I say the a well, the frustrations are very deep today and that may awaken in the oncoming generation, say the graduates, of the last few years from college and so on. But it might bring us to realize that what we need to do is to - if we could get people to realize a little bit more the study of the period of Rome. Moved to, as you know, golden heights and fell flat on its face and we are going through much of the same thing today but we still like to talk about we're the richest nation, we're the this and we're that, we're the best fed but as many of the medical scientists say we may be well fed but we're digging our own graves -

C.J.: With our food?

J.P.: We don't know how to use it.

C.J.: Who's your favorite author or do you have one?

J.P.: Well, I don't know. One of my favorites books - I don't know whether you agree with or not is Wilma Cather's My Antonia.

C.J.: I like Wilma Cather.

J.P.: I like her but I don't know, somehow that little story... And of all Thomas Hardy's works and I can't find a copy of it anywhere but I'm going to try to read it when I go back there, was one of his unclassified works, A Pair of Blue Eyes.

C.J.: I've not heard of that one.

J.P.: I had to do a book review of that in - under Dr. Dice Anderson but it's a - no, I don't mean that because it was under Dr. J. C. Metcalfe - James Calvin - James Calvin Metcalfe. He was a Kentuckian and he was my favorite English teacher and when I checked those coffins out at Norfolk, one afternoon I was checking them there and here was this a - Victor Metcalfe - His only son. He died of the flu there at the Naval set-up in Norfolk. He was a wonderful man.

C.J.: Did you always intend to major in history?

J.P.: No, I was prepared all through and headed for medicine. But I

developed this double vision, this double image. And the - a - Dr. Stewart McGuire, whose father was one of the great surgeons of the early times - Helen McGuire - that was my... I wanted to be a surgeon and he said well, he said with your eye trouble we never can correct it to the point that you will be able to do anything but said you could be a doctor. Well, by the time I finished college, three of my very close classmates had went on into medicine and I couldn't pass the eye test so I drifted into teaching and I haven't regretted it at all.

C.J.: No regrets?

J.P.: No regrets.

C.J.: Well, that's a good place to stop. No regrets.

END OF INTERVIEW